



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

USS ESSEX (LHD 2)  
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From: Commanding Officer, USS ESSEX (LHD 2)  
To: Director, Naval Historical Center

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY 2005

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Encl: (1) Command Data  
(2) Commander's Assessment  
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M. J. KEANEY

## COMMAND DATA

COMMAND SHORT TITLE AND UIC: USS ESSEX (LHD 2)/21533

COMMANDING OFFICER:

Last: Keaney First: Martin M.I.: J. Rank: CAPT/06

DATE ASSUMED COMMAND: 2005-02-27

MISSION/COMMAND EMPLOYMENT/AREA OF OPERATIONS:

- The mission of ESSEX (LHD 2) is to embark, deploy, and land elements of a Marine landing force in an amphibious assault by aircraft, landing craft, and amphibious vehicles. ESSEX' additional role is flagship of an amphibious task force. ESSEX is the second ship of the WASP (LHD 1) class of multipurpose amphibious assault ships.

PERMANENT LOCATION: Sasebo, Japan

IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR IN COMMAND: Commander, Amphibious Group ONE

ASSIGNED TASK FORCE/GROUP/UNIT NAME AND MISSION. NAMED OPERATIONS PARTICIPATED IN DURING TASK FORCE ASSIGNMENT:

- Flagship, Amphibious Group ONE. Mission: conduct sustained combat operations at sea. Participated in Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and UNIFIED ASSISTANCE.

NAME OF FORCES, COMMANDS, SHIPS, SQUADRONS OR UNITS ASSIGNED OR UNDER YOUR OPERATIONAL CONTROL:

- 31<sup>ST</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable (31<sup>ST</sup> MEU (SOC))
- Amphibious Squadron ELEVEN (PHIBRON 11)
- Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Twenty Five (HSC 25)
- Assault Craft Unit One (ACU 1)
- Assault Craft Unit Five (ACU 5)
- Beach Master Unit One (BMU 1)

TYPE AND NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED:

Up to 36: UH-1N Huey, AH-1W Cobra, CH-53 Super Stallion, CH-46 Sea Knight, MH-60 Seahawk, AV-8B Harrier.

Enclosure (1)

COMMANDS, DETACHMENTS OR UNIT DEPLOYED ONBOARD OR STATIONED  
ABOARD AS TENANT ACTIVITIES:

NUMBER OF PERSONNEL ASSIGNED:

Officers: 89 Enlisted: 1,070 Civilian: 2

## **COMMANDER'S ASSESSMENT**

### **Summary Overview**

ESSEX' major accomplishments for 2005 included completing an eight month deployment which included a total six months in the North Arabian Gulf and one month of support for Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE, and the tsunami relief effort in Southeast Asia. While in the Persian Gulf, ESSEX fulfilled the mission of protecting the Iraqi Oil platforms and ensuring sea lanes in the region remained open. More than six million tons of supplies were moved with the assistance of ESSEX and the Amphibious Ready Group.

### **Summary Narrative**

The flagship for the forward deployed Amphibious Ready Group, the Navy's only forward deployed amphibious assault ship, and 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (31<sup>st</sup> MEU(SOC)) worked together as a force multiplier during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE and the normal Fall Patrol from October to December 2005.

Many certifications were completed during the March to April period when ESSEX was transiting from the Persian Gulf to its homeport of Sasebo, Japan. ESSEX successfully completed an Underway Demonstration (UD), Tailored Ship Training Availability (TSTA), Final Evaluation Problem (FEP), Inspection and Survey (INSURV), and Maintenance and Material Management Base Line Assessment (3M BLA).

Major work was completed to the ship during a 90 day Ship's Restricted Availability (SRA). Contractor man hours totaled more than 58 thousand and ship's force hours totaled 42 thousand with nearly 750 SRA and continuous maintenance jobs completed on time or ahead of schedule. Major upgrades included Air Department berthing and head area, the head area for Operations Department, and non-skid for the flight deck, hangar bay and upper vehicle storage.

Following the intensive SRA period, the ship was underway again for the Fall Patrol which included participation in Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHIBLEX) with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel. During the exercise load and off load at Subic Bay Naval Base, ESSEX volunteers completed two community relations projects that involved Olongapo City schools. The Fall Patrol was concluded with a port visit to Hong Kong, prior to the ship's return to Sasebo for the Winter Availability period.

## COMMAND CHRONOLOGY AND NARRATIVE 2005

- 2005-01-01 Operating in the North Arabian Gulf as Amphibious Squadron ELEVEN flagship, protecting sea lanes and ensuring security is maintained around Iraqi Oil Platforms.
- 2005-01-09 Enroute to Bahrain for onload of helicopters to support new mission of providing humanitarian assistance to the survivors of the Southeast Asia Tsunami that struck December 26, 2004.
- 2005-01-10 Anchored off the coast of Bahrain in order to onload MH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron FIFTEEN (HM-15 "Blackhawks"). The heavy lifting helicopters are essential for moving many pounds of supplies to areas within Southeast Asia that were devastated by a tsunami.
- 2005-01-11 Underway from Bahrain enroute to Sumatra to participate in Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE Humanitarian Relief for tsunami survivors.
- 2005-01-18 Operating off the coast of Sumatra delivering supplies to Tsunami survivors.
- 2005-01-21 More than 170,000 pounds of relief supplies delivered since arriving off the coast off Sumatra. MH-53E and MH-60S helicopters flew continuous missions delivering volunteers to the shore to physically move the supplies and fly the supplies to various parts of stricken area.
- 2005-02-03 Cross decked selected personnel for lunch on the French ship, FASM Georges Leygues (D640). Both ships involved in Tsunami relief efforts.
- 2005-02-11 Commander, Combined Support Force 536, U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant General Rusty Blackman comes aboard to present the Commanding Officer with a plaque in appreciation of the ship's contribution to the relief efforts during Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. Moored Singapore to offload some elements of 31<sup>st</sup> MEU.

2005-02-14 Underway from Singapore, enroute 5<sup>TH</sup> Fleet area of responsibility to offload 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet assets, HM-15 helos, and onload 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel who had served in Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

2005-02-26 Anchored Bahrain to offload HM-15 squadron.

2005-02-27 Underway from Bahrain. A memorial ceremony for the fallen shipmates was held in the ship's hangar bay. Forty-eight 31<sup>st</sup> MEU Marines and two Hospital Corpsman lost their lives during their deployment to Iraq. Captain J. M. van Tol is relieved as Commanding Officer by Captain Martin J. Keaney. Captain Keaney had been the Executive Officer the previous 18 months and 'fleeted' up to the position of Commanding Officer.

2005-02-28 Anchored out from Kuwait Naval Base to load 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel and their equipment via Landing Craft Air Cushions (LCAC) and Landing Craft Utility (LCU).

2005-03-10 Three giant sea turtles were spotted caught in fishing nets. ESSEX turned around to get closer to help rescue the turtles. Search and Rescue (SAR) personnel were put in the CO's gig to get close enough to the turtles to cut them free from the netting. All three were freed and swam out to sea.

2005-03-19 Anchored Phuket, Thailand. Liberty port for the ESSEX crew, embarked staff and 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel. Visit also served to show the rest of the world Phuket was open for business after the devastating Tsunami.

2005-03-23 Underway from Phuket enroute to Okinawa, Japan. Several certifications were successfully completed during the transit including UD, TSTA and FEP.

2005-04-01 Moored Okinawa to offload 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel and their equipment.

2005-04-04 Underway from Okinawa enroute to Sasebo, Japan.

2005-05-04 Moored Sasebo to complete eight month deployment.

2005-05-09 Commenced comprehensive inspection conducted by the Board of inspection and Survey.

The Board of Inspection and Survey conducted a MI of ESSEX at Sasebo during the period of 09-13 May 05.

The MI of ESSEX transitioned to an LMI when minimum acceptable equipment for underway operations could not be achieved by 2000 on Day Two of the Inspection.

As described in PREINSURV NORFOLK, VA 102044Z JAN 03, the material inspection was continued with the goals of completing the inspection.

The ship was clean and prepared for the materiel inspection with the exception of Auxiliary and Damage Control Areas. The zone inspection program was effective and ongoing maintenance and preservation program was in place

The ships self-assessment capability was evaluated as satisfactory with the exception of Deck and Aviation was excellent, DC was marginal and Auxiliary was UNSAT.

The ships ability to resolve significant materiel issues during the inspection was evaluated as satisfactory.

2005-06-07 Underway from Sasebo to complete INSURV required underway equipment demonstration. ESSEX suffered a ruptured AFFF pipe which resulted in thousands of water and AFFF flooding amidships on the O2 level. One Sailor died as a result of trying to fix the pipe. Moored Sasebo to complete repairs to the ruptured AFFF pipe.

2005-06-08 Underway from Sasebo enroute to Yokosuka Training Availability (TRAV).

2005-06-08 Moored Yokosuka for TRAV which ran from 13 June to 27 June. More than 500 Sailors completed required fire fighting training.

2005-06-27 Underway from Yokosuka, enroute Sasebo.

2005-06-29 Moored Sasebo, inport for Search and Rescue (SAR) LTT.

2005-07-06 Underway from Sasebo for Amphibious Specialty Training (AST) certification.

2005-07-06 Anchored Sasebo for AST.

2005-07-06 Underway from Sasebo enroute Okinawa.

2005-07-10 Anchored Okinawa for AST certification with the 31<sup>st</sup> MEU.

2005-07-10 Underway from Okinawa enroute Sasebo.

2005-07-12 Moored Sasebo. Ammo offload in preparation for eight-week Selective Restrictive Availability (SRA) period. SRA's focus was on refreshing the ship and its systems. New non-skid was applied to the hangar bay, flight deck and upper vehicle storage deck. Contractor's man hours totaled more than 58 thousand, ship's force man hours were more than 42 thousand with nearly all the 750 SRA and continuous maintenance jobs completed on time or ahead of schedule. Both the Air Department enlisted berthing and shower area and the Operations Department shower area were redone using U.S. Surface Forces habitability funds.

2005-10-03 Underway from Sasebo for Sea Trials post SRA.

2005-10-04 Anchored off the coast of Sasebo to perform anchor drop test and ammo onload.

2005-10-05 Moored Sasebo for refueling.

2005-10-06 Underway from Sasebo enroute to Okinawa.

2005-10-08 Moored Okinawa to onload 31<sup>st</sup> MEU for Fall Patrol.

2005-10-11 Underway from Okinawa enroute to Subic Bay, Philippines for Amphibious Exercise (PHIBLEX)

2005-10-16 Successful Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) drill was held aboard.



2005-10-22 Moored Subic Bay, Philippines for PHIBLEX.

2005-10-23 Sailors from ESSEX and embarked personnel volunteer for a Community Relation project in Olongapo City, Philippines which included painting a two-story school.

2005-10-24 Underway from Subic Bay.

2005-10-29 ESSEX Amphibious Ready Group, 31<sup>st</sup> MEU along with the Armed Forces of the Philippines wrapped up a successful PHIBLEX with a bilateral amphibious landing on Ternate Beach and closing ceremonies.

2005-10-31 Moored Subic Bay to onload 31<sup>st</sup> MEU personnel involved in PHIBLEX.

2005-11-02 Sailors from ESSEX and embarked personnel volunteer for a second Community Relation project in Olongapo City at the Santa Rita Elementary School. Volunteers painted the school building and other renovations.

2005-11-04 Underway from Subic Bay, enroute Okinawa.

2005-11-07 Moored Okinawa to offload 31<sup>st</sup> MEU.

2005-11-10 Underway from Okinawa, enroute Hong Kong.

2005-11-13 Anchored Hong Kong for port visit.

2005-11-16 Twenty-one Sailors volunteer to clean and paint at the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children. This community relations project was the third one completed in the past 30 days by personnel from the ship. American Woman's Association of Hong Kong (AWA), a charitable association chartered in 1956, invited groups of Sailors into homes of Americans living in Hong Kong for an evening of American hospitality and company through a program called "Meals in the Home."

2005-11-17 Underway from Hong Kong enroute Sasebo.

2005-11-21 Moored Sasebo for upkeep.

2005-11-29 Underway from Sasebo to complete SESEF Range and  
Degaussing bi-yearly requirement anchored off  
Yokosuka.

2005-12-04 Moored Sasebo for Winter Availability period.